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ABSTRACT

The residence hall environment at Indiana University is evaluated annually by an ecosystems method of evaluation which permits students to identify problems and provide recommendations for change. In the Fall of 1980 a sample of undergraduates (N=732) living in residence halls responded to a series of statements about life in the residence halls. Compared to evaluations from 1978 and 1979, results from the 1980 evaluation showed that student safety had become a major issue. Students in the 1980 sample were more satisfied than students in previous years with study conditions. Staff, food service, and residence life received high ratings from the students. Areas in need of improvement included guest speakers, faculty contacts, and personal development activities. Based upon the response data, efforts were made to improve the living environment in the residence centers. (The evaluation instrument is included in the appendix.) (NRB)

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AN EVALUATION OF LIFE IN THE RESIDENCE HALLS AT INDIANA UNIVERSITY FROM AN ECOSYSTEM PERSPECTIVE

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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John Schuh

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

The purpose of this report is to discuss an ecosystems environmental assessment project undertaken during the fall, 1980, which evaluated the residence hall environment at Indiana University, Bloomington. This project is part of an ongoing process by which the residence hall environment on the Bloomington campus is evaluated annually.

The rationale behind using the ecosystems method is that it provides a process by which students can be involved directly in designing their living environment. This particular method provides an opportunity for students to identify the problem areas of their environment, and provide suggestions and recommendations as to how the problems areas might be improved. The ecosystem method differs from other paper and pencil reports because the method provides for students to provide direct recommendations for change, whereas many other methods elicit feedback, but not recommendations for change.

An environmental assessment project was conducted during the latter part of the fall semester of both 1978 and 1979. This paper will attempt to report not only the results of the 1980 project, but also compare and contrast the results of the 1980 project with those of the 1978 and 1979 projects.

This report includes data for undergraduate residence halls only. Data for the graduate center is available on request.

Method

The sample selected for this project was drawn on a systematic basis. Each center, with the exception of MRC, drew a sample of 100 students. Due to the smaller size, MRC proportionally included 50 students in the sample. These students included in the sample were identified by use of a roster of student residents. The total population of each center (except MRC) was divided by 100. The resulting quotient was the number used to identify students to be included in the sample. For example, in a center of 1100 students, the resulting quotient is eleven. Thereafter, every eleventh student was included in the sample. While this

method of drawing a sample was not random, it was considered to be reasonably representative, since each living unit had a minimum of one student included in the sample.

The instrument used in this project was developed by the authors. It was based on the questionnaire used previously. Representatives from RHA and the Halls of Residence department were invited to submit questions for inclusion in the questionnaire. They did so. A unique feature was that individual residence centers had the opportunity to submit not more than five additional questions which examined issues of particular interest to the center. The instrument is included as Appendix A.

The data were collected by distributing the questionnaires to those included in the sample through resident assistants. All responses were anonymous. The students were asked to complete the instruments and return them to a designated place in the center. Most often this process was accomplished by having the instruments returned to the main desk. A follow-up collection was implemented in those centers where the response rate was poor. In those instances additional questionnaires were distributed to those students who had indicated that they had not responded within a one-week period of time. All data were collected during October, 1980.

Russ Bumba and Dennis Murphy supervised the data analysis plan. They wrote SPSS computer programs which analyzed the data and yielded frequency distributions, means, modes, medians and histograms for each item on a center by center basis. Additionally, a system-wide analysis of data was undertaken.

Results

Of the 950 students included in the sample, 732 responded, for a response of 77 percent. The class standing of the respondents is reported in Table 1. Following the general mix of students living in the residence halls, the largest group of respondents was freshmen, followed by sophomores, juniors and seniors.

Table 1

Class Standing of Respondents

Class Standing	Percentage of Respondents
Freshman	46.2%
Sophomore	27.6%
Junior	14.6%
Senior	8.7%
Graduate	.5%
No response	2.3%

More females completed more questionnaires than males which is consistent with the actual sexual population of the residence halls. However, it should be noted that more females live in the residence halls than males. The researchers were unable to determine why a relatively large percentage of students did not respond to this item. These data are reported in Table 2.

Table 2

Sex of Respondents

Sex	Percentage of Respondents
Female	49.9%
Male	43.9%
No response	6.1%

The other demographic variable asked whether or not the respondents had lived in their present residence center prior to the Fall, 1980, semester. More respondents indicated that they had not lived in their present center prior to the fall semester. These data are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3

Previous Experience Living in Present Residence Center

Response	Percentage of Respondents
Yes	42.1%
No	54.4%
No response	3.5%

Students completing the questionnaire responded on a seven point Likert-type scale as to whether or not they agreed with a series of statements about life in the residence halls. A summary of the number of responses on an item by item basis is presented in Table 4. By examining this table the reader will be able to determine tendencies for each item, and measure the distribution of responses for each item. It is clear that for some items the responses tend to be clustered together, indicating some unanimity of perception of the item on the part of the respondents. However, for other items, responses are bimodal, indicating differences of perceptions on the part of the respondents.

Mean scores were developed for each item. The researchers determined that a mean score of less than four indicated a negative response on the part of the respondents toward the item they were evaluating, while a score of more than four indicated a positive perception. Most items had mean scores of more than four. A complete summary of these data is listed in Table 5.

A feature of this year's study was to repeat a number of items in this questionnaire from the two previous questionnaires. It is interesting to note that students reacted less positively to 14 items and more positively to 12 items in the 1980 study as compared with the 1979 study. Moreover, the respondents reacted less favorably to 4 items and more favorably to 17 items in the 1980 survey as compared with the 1978 survey. These data also are listed in Table 5.

Table 4

Responses to Individual Items

PART I

Listed below are a series of statements. Please read them and on the continuum to the right of each statement, indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with it by placing an X in the appropriate blank.

The following definitions of terms may be useful to you:

Resident Assistant (Resident Fellow): This person is an upperclass or graduate student who is assigned to a floor or hall and is responsible for interpersonal, social, and academic experiences of students.

Residence Life Staff: Includes Resident Assistants (Resident Fellows) and Residence Life Coordinators.

Halls of Residence Staff: Includes the Housing Manager, maintenance and custodial personnel, and clerical staff.

	(7) Very Strongly Agree			(4) Neutral			(1) Very Strongly Disagree
1. The "Ins and Outs," distributed at registration, provides an adequate description of services and resources to students on campus.	59	208	208	219	20	4	7
2. There are adequate opportunities for social activities in my living unit (house, floor, hall).	123	245	180	87	60	15	16
3. Interesting, informative guest speakers make presentations in my center.	15	28	67	243	139	114	122
4. I am familiar with the services provided by the Learning Skills Center.	38	41	71	142	144	127	165
5. The Halls of Residence staff are responsive to my needs concerning physical facilities.	95	150	181	192	61	18	30
6. I am able to study in my room when I wish to.	126	133	158	91	98	42	66
7. The resident assistants (resident fellows in MRC) are available to meet my needs.	202	216	139	121	20	16	8
8. The Halls of Residence Office staff are responsive and helpful in providing main desk services.	161	207	187	93	48	19	14
9. Student government in my residence center offers me opportunities to participate in leadership positions.	128	153	155	222	33	19	21
10. Established quiet hours help create an atmosphere which supports my efforts to study in my room.	82	116	107	163	97	70	91
11. I am satisfied with the opportunities I have to meet with faculty members in my residence center.	37	75	91	283	118	69	55
12. My student government responds adequately to the needs expressed by residents of this center.	51	89	164	291	65	38	31
13. I have adequate opportunities to participate in recreational programs in my recreational center.	188	226	177	100	23	8	7

Table 4 Con't.

	(7) Very Strongly Agree			(4) Neutral			(1) Very Strongly Disagree
14. I am satisfied with how well I do on my examinations and other assignments.	56 / 172 /	183 /	123 /	107 /	56 /	31 /	
15. I know the rules of my residence center.	144 / 215 /	218 /	97 /	41 /	12 /	7	
16. The opportunity for cultural events in my center, i.e., concerts, arts, crafts, meets my needs.	66 / 103 /	125 /	229 /	106 /	46 /	53	
17. I have an opportunity to talk with someone in my center about personal problems, such as homesickness, relationships, or academics.	152 / 148 /	147 /	168 /	59 /	26 /	28	
18. There are adequate opportunities for social activities in my center.	121 / 190 /	204 /	104 /	70 /	22 /	19	
19. The Key/Guide to Graduate Living does a good job of describing residence hall living at Indiana University.	60 / 121 /	144 /	336 /	31 /	13 /	12	
20. The custodian in my living unit keeps the area clean.	299 / 205 /	104 /	45 /	34 /	25 /	18	
21. I have an opportunity to study in alternative areas of the residence center, such as libraries or study halls.	306 / 222 /	131 /	41 /	17 /	7 /	6 /	
22. I have received adequate printed information which describes the services and resources available to students in my center.	111 / 157 /	210 /	130 /	79 /	26 /	17	
23. I feel safe and secure in my residence center.	169 / 199 /	178 /	93 /	46 /	25 /	19	
24. The general attitude of the food service staff is helpful and friendly.	89 / 135 /	213 /	109 /	78 /	47 /	55	
25. I know the rules and regulations of I.U.	108 / 201 /	237 /	117 /	50 /	10 /	5	
26. I have been able to develop an effective study schedule.	79 / 174 /	205 /	132 /	87 /	28 /	24	
27. I am satisfied with the quality of the preparation of the food by the dining hall staff in my center.	33 / 65 /	119 /	125 /	128 /	102 /	156	
28. When I have a problem in my center, I am aware of the procedures to follow to remedy the situation.	65 / 124 /	204 /	170 /	110 /	34 /	20	
29. I am in favor of a policy allowing residents to enter the dining hall only once per meal which would help prevent non-residents from entry. This policy would not rule out second servings for residents or guests.	121 / 43 /	98 /	159 /	79 /	59 /	118	
30. I am aware of personal development activities such as assertiveness and leadership training being offered in my center.	29 / 42 /	91 /	227 /	163 /	104 /	74	
31. The food service staff is helpful in assisting with food planning for social functions.	36 / 56 /	93 /	131 /	52 /	28 /	27	

Table 5

Mean Scores for the 1978, 1979 and 1980 Surveys

		$\bar{X}$ Fall 1978	$\bar{X}$ Fall 1979	$\bar{X}$ Fall 1980
1.	The "Ins and Outs," distributed at registration, provides an adequate description of services and resources to students on campus.	*	5.03	5.04
2.	There are adequate opportunities for social activities in my living unit (house, floor, hall.).	4.92	5.16	5.24
3.	Interesting, informative guest speakers make presentations in my center.	2.30	3.04	3.22
4.	The Halls of Residence staff are responsive to my needs concerning physical facilities.	4.59	4.52	4.80
5.	The Halls of Residence Office staff are responsive and helpful in providing main desk services.	6.02	5.26	5.31
6.	I am able to study in my room when I wish to.	4.20	4.46	4.53
7.	The resident assistants (resident fellows in MRC) in my center are available to meet my needs.	5.19	5.62	5.53
8.	I have adequate opportunities to participate in recreational programs offered through my residence center.	5.33	5.66	5.55
9.	Student government in my residence center offers me opportunities to participate in leadership positions.	4.32	5.08	4.97
10.	Established quiet hours help create an atmosphere which supports my efforts to study in my room.	3.86	4.01	4.10
11.	I am satisfied with the opportunities I have to meet with faculty members in my residence center.	3.41	3.90	3.91

*=Did not appear in 1978 questionnaire
7=Very Strongly Agree; 1=Very Strongly Disagree

Table 5 Con't.

		$\bar{x}$ 1978	$\bar{x}$ 1979	$\bar{x}$ 1980
12.	I know the rules of my residence center.	5.19	5.56	5.36
13.	The opportunity for cultural events in my center, i.e., concerts, arts and crafts, meets my needs.	3.68	3.98	4.24
14.	I have an opportunity to talk with someone in my center about personal problems, such as homesickness, relationships, or academics.	4.40	4.87	4.98
15.	I have an opportunity to study in alternative areas of the residence center, such as libraries or study halls.	*	5.92	5.99
16.	There are adequate opportunities for social activities in my center.	4.81	5.11	5.09
17.	The Key does a good job of describing residence hall living at Indiana University.	4.68	4.96	4.66
18.	The custodian in my living unit keeps the area clean.	5.51	5.87	5.74
19.	I have received adequate printed information which describes the services and resources available to students in my center.	4.71	5.12	4.93
20.	I feel safe and secure in my residence center.	5.30	5.33	5.27
21.	The general attitude of the staff employed in the food service department is courteous and helpful.	4.22	4.67	4.57
22.	I know the rules and regulations of I.U.	*	5.26	5.21
23.	I am in favor of a policy allowing residents to enter the dining hall only once per meal. This helps prevent non-residents from causing increased food costs which are reflected in the board rate. This does not rule out second servings for residents or paying guests.	4.36	4.77	4.13

*=Did not appear in 1978 questionnaire
7=Very Strongly Agree; 1=Very Strongly Disagree

Table 5 Con't.

	$\bar{X}$ 1978	$\bar{X}$ 1979	$\bar{X}$ 1980
24. I am aware of personal development activities such as assertiveness and leadership training being offered in my center.	*	3.76	3.58
25. I am satisfied with the quality of food preparation in my residence center.	2.68	3.28	3.38
26. When I have a problem in my center I am aware of the procedures to follow to remedy the situation.	*	4.54	4.56

*=Did not appear in 1978 questionnaire
7=Very Strongly Agree; 1=Very Strongly Disagree

The results to Part II were compiled in the individual residence centers and analyzed by the community councils. These results are available from the residence life coordinators in each center.

Summary

This paper has reported the results of the 1980 ecosystems study of the residence hall environment at Indiana University. The purpose of the study was to provide a method by which students could report perceptions of their environment, and provide suggestions for improving that environment. Data were collected during Fall, 1980, and work has begun in the various residence centers to improve the living environment based upon the response data.

Several individual items are worthy of note. Student safety has been a major issue on campus during the fall. Item number 20 addressed the issue of student safety in the residence halls. The mean student response for 1980 was the lowest of the three years this study has been conducted. However, the range was only .06 from the highest mean score (5.33 in 1979) to the lowest (5.27 in 1980).

The highest mean score (4.53) of the three years the survey was conducted was reported for 1980 concerning the item examining study conditions. Since this issue (study conditions) has been a major concern of the Department of Residence Life, these results are heartening.

Staff from Halls of Residence, Food Service, and Residence Life received high marks from students as was the use for social and recreational programming. More work needs to be done in the programmatic areas of guest speakers, faculty contact, and personal development activities.

If the quality of life in the residential centers at Indiana University is to improve, changes will need to made in the individual centers as well as in the system as a whole. Reports, such as this one, provide some direction for those changes. Each residence life coordinator has indicated that action plans will be undertaken in the centers in their areas of responsibility. They report that this process has been a useful one for them, and they look forward to participating in another ecosystem survey during the Fall of 1981.

Appendix A

Indiana University

October 13, 1980

Dear Resident Student,

One of the objectives we have is to make living in the residence halls be a rewarding experience for students. Students should have a regular opportunity to provide information to organizations such as the Community Councils and the staff assigned to the various centers on how they perceive life in the center.

With that in mind, you have been selected as one of approximately 10% of the residential population to complete the attached questionnaire. It should not take more than 20 minutes to do so. The information you provide will be extremely useful in attempting to modify the environment in which you live.

We want to assure you that all responses will be anonymous. Let us thank you in advance for your cooperation.

Sincerely yours,

John H. Schuh, Director
Department of Residence Life

David A. Neumann, President
Residence Halls Association

Leland R. Ratliff, Director
Halls of Residence

Please answer the following three questions by placing an X in the blank space that represents the best answer to the question, and then go on to the next page:

Please indicate your class standing:
Freshman ____
Sophomore ____
Junior ____
Senior ____
Graduate ____

Please indicate your sex:
Female ____
Male ____

Please indicate that prior to the Fall, 1980, semester, if you have lived in your present residence center:

Yes ____ 14
No ____

PART I

Listed below are a series of statements. Please read them and on the continuum to the right of each statement, indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with it by placing an X in the appropriate blank.

The following definitions of terms may be useful to you:

Resident Assistant (Resident Fellow): This person is an upperclass or graduate student who is assigned to a floor or hall and is responsible for interpersonal, social, and academic experiences of students.

Residence Life Staff: Includes Resident Assistants (Resident Fellows) and Residence Life Coordinators.

Halls of Residence Staff: Includes the Housing Manager, maintenance and custodial personnel, and clerical staff.

	(7) Very Strongly Agree			(4) Neutral			(1) Very Strongly Disagree
1. The "Ins and Outs," distributed at registration, provides an adequate description of services and resources to students on campus.	___	___	___	_____	___	___	___
2. There are adequate opportunities for social activities in my living unit (house, floor, hall).	___	___	___	_____	___	___	___
3. Interesting, informative guest speakers make presentations in my center.	___	___	___	_____	___	___	___
4. I am familiar with the services provided by the Learning Skills Center.	___	___	___	_____	___	___	___
5. The Halls of Residence staff are responsive to my needs concerning physical facilities.	___	___	___	_____	___	___	___
6. I am able to study in my room when I wish to.	___	___	___	_____	___	___	___
7. The resident assistants (resident fellows in MRC) are available to meet my needs.	___	___	___	_____	___	___	___
8. The Halls of Residence Office staff are responsive and helpful in providing main desk services.	___	___	___	_____	___	___	___
9. Student government in my residence center offers me opportunities to participate in leadership positions.	___	___	___	_____	___	___	___
10. Established quiet hours help create an atmosphere which supports my efforts to study in my room.	___	___	___	_____	___	___	___
11. I am satisfied with the opportunities I have to meet with faculty members in my residence center.	___	___	___	_____	___	___	___
12. My student government responds adequately to the needs expressed by residents of this center.	___	___	___	_____	___	___	___
13. I have adequate opportunities to participate in recreational programs in my recreational center.	___	___	___	_____	___	___	___

	(7) Very Strongly Agree			(4) Neutral			(1) Very Strongly Disagree
14. I am satisfied with how well I do on my examinations and other assignments.	___	___	___	___	___	___	___
15. I know the rules of my residence center.	___	___	___	___	___	___	___
16. The opportunity for cultural events in my center, i.e., concerts, arts, crafts, meets my needs.	___	___	___	___	___	___	___
17. I have an opportunity to talk with someone in my center about personal problems, such as homesickness, relationships, or academics.	___	___	___	___	___	___	___
18. There are adequate opportunities for social activities in my center.	___	___	___	___	___	___	___
19. The Key/Guide to Graduate Living does a good job of describing residence hall living at Indiana University.	___	___	___	___	___	___	___
20. The custodian in my living unit keeps the area clean.	___	___	___	___	___	___	___
21. I have an opportunity to study in alternative areas of the residence center, such as libraries or study halls.	___	___	___	___	___	___	___
22. I have received adequate printed information which describes the services and resources available to students in my center.	___	___	___	___	___	___	___
23. I feel safe and secure in my residence center.	___	___	___	___	___	___	___
24. The general attitude of the food service staff is helpful and friendly.	___	___	___	___	___	___	___
25. I know the rules and regulations of I.U.	___	___	___	___	___	___	___
26. I have been able to develop an effective study schedule.	___	___	___	___	___	___	___
27. I am satisfied with the quality of the preparation of the food by the dining hall staff in my center.	___	___	___	___	___	___	___
28. When I have a problem in my center, I am aware of the procedures to follow to remedy the situation.	___	___	___	___	___	___	___
29. I am in favor of a policy allowing residents to enter the dining hall only once per meal which would help prevent non-residents from entry. This policy would not rule out second servings for residents or guests.	___	___	___	___	___	___	___
30. I am aware of personal development activities such as assertiveness and leadership training being offered in my center.	___	___	___	___	___	___	___
31. The food service staff is helpful in assisting with food planning for social functions.	___	___	___	___	___	___	___

PART II

Now that you have completed Part I, go back through the items and identify not more than five items that you feel very strongly about, in either a positive or negative sense. Write the number of those items in the blocks provided below. Then, next to the item number, write why you feel strongly about the item, and what you would recommend to improve the situation.

Item Number	WHY DO YOU FEEL STRONGLY ABOUT THE ITEM	WHAT CAN BE DONE TO IMPROVE THE SITUATION

Thank you for your help with this project.